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Home at Seven

LauraSue Epstein

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Home at Seven

A Play by LauraSue Epstein*

Characters:

DENNIS:	30-35. No longer physically fit. Tired. Shelter staff.
CASSIE:	20-50. Used up. Timid, affectionate. Dirty, but meticulous. Guest.
JULIA:	Late teens to early 20's. Thin, wiry, strong. Well kept. Guest.
BERNARD:	Late 30's to early 40's. Burly, sloppy, restless. Interior rumblings. Guest.
IKE:	Late 20's to early 30's. Small but powerful. Athletic. Easy rhythms, gentle voice. Charming, and sly. Guest.
LEE:	60'ish. Looks younger than her years. Tall, broad, warm. Guest.
TOM:	Early 20's. Lanky. Wasted. Lost. Guest.
LARRAINE:	30'ish. Muscular, small. High energy. Volunteer.
HATTIE:	30-35. Competent, warm. A bit tired. Married to Dennis.
WAYNE:	Silent, sullen. Ageless. Guest.
GAIL:	30's. Attractive, stylish. Lives with Larraine.

* LauraSue Epstein Schlatter is a second year J.D. candidate at the University of Minnesota Law School. Before starting law school, she worked as a playwright, with productions and readings of her work in Minnesota, Boston, New York, and Colorado. Her involvement with the issues of homelessness began in 1983 when Joe Skelley, Paul Kiley, and Fr. Edward Flahavan at St. Stephen's Church in Minneapolis commissioned her to write a play based on the St. Stephen's emergency shelter. Her experiences in the shelter and with the shelter community played a major role in her decision to pursue a legal education. *Home at Seven* has been produced twice—in 1984 it ran for two weeks at the Hennepin Center for the Arts in Minneapolis, and in 1985 it toured five cities in Minnesota over a period of seven weeks.

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This play is dedicated to "Fast Eddie B.," who tried a little too hard and a little too often to get home; and to Ron Schlatter, who made the second production a reality in the face of impossible obstacles.

- FATHER J.: 50'ish. Strong sense of irony. Contained energy. Parish priest, Dennis' boss.
- ANCHORMAN: 40's. Ageless, timeless. Small town sleek. Evening news reporter.
- CAMERAWOMAN: 30'ish. Practical, earthy, sensible, competent. Accompanies anchorman.
- NEIGHBOR: Resident of neighborhood in which shelter is located.
- STRANGER: Unfamiliar shelter guest.
- STEPHEN: Innocent. Red-cheeked, fresh-faced. Unfamiliar new shelter volunteer.

The action takes place during winter and early spring in and around an emergency shelter for homeless people. A large U.S. city.

"The Swimming Song"

This summer I went swimming,
 This summer I might have drowned.
 But I held my breath, and I kicked my feet
 And I moved my arms around,
 Yeah, moved my arms around.

This summer I swam in the ocean,
 Then I swam in a swimming pool,
 Salt my wounds, chlorined my eyes,
 I'm a self-destructive fool,
 A self-destructive fool.

This summer I did the backstroke
 And y'know that that's not all,
 I did the breaststroke and the butterfly
 And the old Australian crawl,
 The old Australian crawl.

This summer I swam in a public place,
 And a reservoir to boot,
 At the latter I was informal,
 At the former I wore my suit,
 I wore my swimming suit.

This summer I did swandives,
 And jack knives for you all,
 And once when you weren't looking
 I did a cannonball,
 I did a cannonball.

Words and music by Loudon Wainwright III

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SCENE I

Lights up on the shelter area. Early evening, 6:30 or so. The Shelter is empty; the tables sit deserted, chairs pushed under them. There is no clutter in the room at all. To the far right is an office area with a desk, two chairs, a coat rack, and filing cabinet.

It is winter time and the only lights in the room are the street lights and passing car lights streaming through the high basement windows.

DENNIS enters, carrying a briefcase stuffed to bursting and shabby. He also carries a stack of blankets, used but clean, and a medium sized stuffed animal, one-eyed with some opened seams, a bit dirty. He comes in from outside—it is cold and blowing out and he seems to be blown in on the wind. His momentum carries him to a table, where he collapses, dropping his burdens, then slipping into a chair and letting his head drop into the blankets. Beat, silence. Gradually, from just beyond the edges of the shelter walls come voices and figures, shadowy at first, then gradually more distinct. They move into the shelter fairly quickly, heedless of physical boundaries such as walls. These are the manifestations of DENNIS' awareness of the people he sees daily. They speak, sometimes consecutively, sometimes overlapping, always to DENNIS who never looks directly at any of them.

CASSIE

Singing

This summer I did swandives,
And jack knives for you all,
And once when you weren't looking
I did a cannonball,
I did a cannonball.

Speaking

You remember that, don't you? Of course you do! You taught it to me!

JULIA

They taught me to milk a barn full of cows and fix a stalled combine, but they never taught me to survive. Never taught me to write a resume, or say just the right things at a job interview. They never taught me how to know who to believe.

JULIA

Does it make sense to you,
Dennis, why I'm here? Now?

IKE

Celebratin' is what I'm
gonna be doin' for the first
month after I'm outta here.
Man, I get outta here by the
first a next month, there'll be
plenty a time for a Christmas
party! Man, that party'll go
down in history!

CASSIE

Cigarette! I want a ciga-
rette! Anybody got a Marlboro?
Soft pack?

*Silence. A beat. Then a pickup in tempo and
intensity.*

JULIA

Anyone seen my backpack? I need my emory board. Broke
my nail.

*JULIA spots her pack, digs for a file, files her
nails.*

IKE

Packin' us in here like eggs in a basket, huh Dennis? Being
so close to so many folks makes me itch!

IKE starts scratching and thumping like a dog.

BERNARD

Pac-man! Lost m'last fuckin' quarter on lousy little Ms. Pac-
man! Shit! I gotta have some change here!

*BERNARD starts rustling through his belong-
ings—an old athletic bag full of newspapers, bot-
tles, mementoes, toiletries, etc. The rustling,
scratching sound grows louder.*

LEE

Pack up an' leave an' they'll follow you wherever you go.

BERNARD

Believe me, Denny-boy, I
appreciate everything ya do for
me. Ah mean, invitin' me ta
your house for m'birthday is
above an' beyond, hey? An' be-
lieve me, Denny, ah never in-
tended ta come smashed. Hell,
if a guy can't get smashed in
honor of his fortieth birthday,
then what? The big four-oh,
Denny—see if you don't feel
like a big celebration when it
hits you, Denny-boy.

JULIA

Certain parties who shall
remain nameless—for now—
have not shown proper re-
spect—I am a woman of in-
dependent but limited re-
sources. I am generous to a
fault but I will not supply li-
quor or cigarettes!

That's what I learned, Dennis. You think you've gotten clean away, you open your bag, and there they are—your loyal baggage—just try to lose 'em.

LEE *laughs*.

CASSIE

Lost my knitting. All I've got left is the needles.

CASSIE *clicks the needles together. The scratching, clicking, and rustling grows louder, joined by noises at the window, a scratching and tapping. DENNIS sits up, focusing. The phantoms fade away and the scratching at the window is clearly heard. DENNIS is riveted to the sound, silent and unmoving.*

DENNIS

Hello? Who's there? Bernard . . . ?

As DENNIS *heads for the window, the phantoms steal out of range of his sight. DENNIS looks up at the window, gets a chair, climbs on it.*

DENNIS

Bernard? Ike?

No clear response. More jiggling and scratching. DENNIS *finds his courage, unlocks the window, yanks it open. TOM's head pops in.*

TOM

This the shelter?

DENNIS *Stunned.*

My God!

TOM

Doesn't look like a shelter. Where're the beds?

DENNIS

You scared me to death. Who are you?

TOM

Tom. Is this where I come to get a place to sleep?

DENNIS

Not in the window!

BERNARD's *voice shoots from the shadows.*

BERNARD

Let me in, you asshole, or I'll break every window in the place!

DENNIS *turns, but sees no one.*

DENNIS

Clean it up, Ber—

BERNARD *is gone.*

TOM

Who you talkin' to, man?

DENNIS

No one. Now listen, you want a place to sleep, right?

TOM

Just one night; just passing through. Goin' to Boston to see my sister.

DENNIS

Be at the side door at seven o'clock. People who were here last night get first picks. Then it's first come, first serve.

TOM

Man, it's cold out here!

DENNIS

We can't open up until seven o'clock. I'm sorry.

JULIA *From the shadows*

Seven o'clock! Seven o'clock! Hey! I know a word game called seven o'clock! Anybody wanna play?

TOM

So I just wait out here?

DENNIS

It's warm at the Free Kitchen. You can get some dinner there; it's just around the corner.

NEIGHBOR

Free beds, free kitchens—the bums on Mars are hearin' this is the place to come if you wanna freeload. Who needs it? This was a solid neighborhood 'til you folks moved in with your free-for-all flophouse!

DENNIS *Ignoring the neighbor, to TOM*

Whyn't you go get some dinner? Come back at seven.

TOM

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

TOM disappears. DENNIS sticks his head out, watching him go. LARRAINE enters from the hallway, sees DENNIS.

LARRAINE

Excuse me?

DENNIS

Oh! Hi!

LARRAINE

I'm looking for Dennis Hill?

DENNIS *Disentangling himself from the window*

I'm Dennis. Are you the volunteer for tonight?

LARRAINE

Yes. I'm Larraine.

DENNIS *steps down. They shake hands.*

DENNIS

Have you been trained?

LARRAINE

One session.

DENNIS

You're a pro.

LARRAINE

I'm sorry I'm late. I know I was supposed to be here by six, but—

HATTIE *emerges from the shadows, speaking over*
LARRAINE.

LARRAINE

—my roommate had some car trouble, then I got caught in a traffic jam, you know that only seems to happen when you're in a terrific hurry. I couldn't believe it. Well, where do I start?

HATTIE

Six o'clock Dennis, don't forget. I'll get Annie from the sitter, but you've got the car, so stop by my sister's by six at the latest and get the baby. She's got class at 6:30 and I don't want to make her late, okay? Six?

DENNIS

Shit!

LARRAINE

Pardon me?

DENNIS

I'm sorry, Larraine, I just remembered something. I've gotta make an urgent phone call. Here.

DENNIS *digs for a large batch of keys, throws them at LARRAINE, who catches them.*

DENNIS

One of those'll open the kitchen at the far end of the hall. Get some coffee going, will you? The big forty-cup urn. I've gotta call my wife.

LARRAINE *looks at the keys and* DENNIS,
shrugs; exits. DENNIS is on the phone.

DENNIS

Hattie? Do you have the baby? I know, I know. I'm sorry, Hat, I just forgot to pick him up. I don't believe it finally happened. I really just forgot. It shouldn't—it won't happen again. Is everything okay there? Yeah, I've got him here. *(He picks up the*

stuffed animal.) Found him stuffed into my briefcase. Hat? Thanks. People like you are rewarded. Eventually. Bye love. Bye.

DENNIS *hangs up, stares at the phone.*

DENNIS *To himself*

It's gone too far. People climbing in through windows, forgetting the baby—Dennis, you forgot your own son! Well, I knew he was in good hands. Lighten up a bit, huh?

BERNARD's *phantom enters, dribbling a basketball.*

BERNARD

Lighten up, Denny. Don'tcha know how ta play no more? C'mon, le's shoot a few. Bet Ah can beat the crap outta ya. Ah'll even do it sober! Ha!

DENNIS *smiles to himself, puts his hand to his nose.*

DENNIS

He broke my fuckin' nose. Talk about sober.

LARRAINE *dashes in. She is damp.* BERNARD *moves into the shadows.*

LARRAINE

Hey Dennis?

DENNIS

Yeah?

LARRAINE

The hot water faucet—came off in my hand. *(She holds up the fixture.)* There's hot water spraying all over the place.

DENNIS

Shit! *(To the shadows)* Anything else?

He dashes off, leaving LARRAINE, who looks around, puzzled.

LARRAINE

Is someone there? I thought the shelter didn't open until—
She is drowned out by BERNARD, who is pounding on the door, shouting.

BERNARD

Seven o'clock! C'mon, it's seven o'clock an' it's bitchin' cold out here!

LARRAINE *hesitates, panicky.* DENNIS *reenters, holding a piece of faucet. He is wet.*

DENNIS

Larraine, could you— *(Seeing her hesitation)* You haven't opened before?

LARRAINE

There's always a first time.

DENNIS

It's that or the floods.

LARRAINE *On her way to the door*

You're already wet.

They exchange smiles. LARRAINE goes to the door, puts her hand on the knob, draws a breath. End Scene I.

SCENE II.

The action continues from the end of Scene I. LARRAINE opens the door and the guests enter: IKE, LEE, CASSIE, TOM, JULIA, WAYNE. They move in slow, stylized movement. LARRAINE greets them, they get settled. The blankets get distributed. The stuffed animal disappears among CASSIE's belongings in the confusion.

LARRAINE changes her scarf, or some piece of clothing to help indicate a passage of time. DENNIS is not present. It is 7:15 PM in the shelter, one week later. There are pads spread out on all available floor space, each pad defining a small, distinct territory. LEE is lying on her pad, playing solitaire. TOM is on his pad, reading. JULIA, IKE and WAYNE are at the tables. JULIA and IKE are playing backgammon. WAYNE is watching TV. CASSIE sits off to one side, knitting and watching the comings and goings, singing to herself. TV note: The TV faces upstage, so that the picture cannot be seen, but the sound, at a low level or louder when specified, is constant throughout the scenes when the shelter is in operation. Presently, there is a hockey game on.

LARRAINE closes the door, moves into the room, a little uncomfortable. She goes to a central spot, looks at a notebook lying on the table, listens for a moment to CASSIE's song.

CASSIE

This summer I went swimming,
This summer I almost drowned,
But I kicked my feet, and I held my breath,

and I moved my arms around,
Yes, I moved my arms around.

CASSIE *continues her song. LARRAINE holds the notebook up.*

LARRAINE

Has everyone signed in?

No response, except from CASSIE, who stops her song, looks at LARRAINE.

JULIA *Playing backgammon with IKE*

Haha! Double fours!

IKE

Shee . . . it

CASSIE

Sign you life away.

LARRAINE *To CASSIE*

Excuse me?

LARRAINE timidly moves toward CASSIE, who looks at her suspiciously. LEE intercepts.

LEE

Don't mind her.

LARRAINE

No?

LEE

Cassie wasn't exactly talking to you. If you know what I mean.

LARRAINE *Confused, looks around. No one is forthcoming with confirmation. She turns back to LEE.*

Have you signed in?

JULIA

That guy all the way around?

IKE

Yup. An' look who's followin'.

LEE

Yes, I signed in. Weren't you here last week?

LARRAINE

Yeah—the night the plumbing broke.

LEE

And you're back! Congratulations, Miss! Or is it Ms?

LARRAINE

Larraine is just fine.

LEE

Larraine. Pretty name, Larraine.

LARRAINE

Well, thank you. (*Loudly, to the room at large*) Is there anyone who hasn't signed in?

IKE

No! Julia! Wha'd you do ta those dice? Huh?

LEE

I'm collecting pretty names. My daughter's pregnant.

LARRAINE

CASSIE

Congratulations!

I won't sign nothing . . .

Sign your life away.

LARRAINE attempts a smile, but loses her ability to maintain it; she lets it go, replaces the book on the table. There is a pounding on the door. She jumps up to get it. While she is gone, other conversations continue.

IKE

New volunteer, Lee?

LEE

She was here last week. You ought to try to remember people, Ike. Good exercise for your brain.

IKE

Yeah. *He rolls the dice.*

Shit! Can't take it.

IKE looks back to LEE; JULIA rolls.

IKE

I make it a point not to remember someone 'til they've been around at least three weeks. I'd justa soon never meet another new volunteer. I'd justa soon be outta this place b'fore I git ta know another soul.

JULIA

In with three and send that one back.

IKE

What you doin' ta me, girl?

JULIA

Beating the pants off you.

IKE

Grinning

I hope not. These're the only pants I got.

TOM

Way I see it, there's two ways to get out of here.

JULIA *To IKE*

Take your turn.

To TOM

We're not in jail, you know.

TOM

Ever heard of a priori knowledge?

IKE

LEE

Huh?

Kant.

JULIA

Sounds Italian to me.

TOM *rolls the dice.*

CASSIE

Run your life on a roll a the dice.

TOM

It means knowing something because you figured it out; deduced it. Not because you experienced it.

IKE

Shit. Stuck again.

JULIA *laughs.*

LEE

So?

TOM

So I figure that in order—look, if you really want to get outta this place, you either sweat your butt off doing shit work for minimum wage or less—and wind up back where you started. Or . . . or, you deduce the way out. Make the quantum leap into possibilities that come out of reasoning, not out of experience. This isn't just another desperate job hunt. There's more to it than that.

JULIA

Double sixes.

IKE

Fuck you.

CASSIE

Roll of the dice and a spin of the wheel . . .

LEE

What's that you've been reading, Tom?

TOM

Ever hear of Immanuel Kant?

BERNARD *enters, followed by LARRAINE.*

BERNARD *carries a package.*

BERNARD

M'friends! M'friends!

Everyone looks up except WAYNE, who remains glued to the TV.

WAYNE

Muttering

Watch the volume!

BERNARD

M'brothers an' sisters!

CASSIE

I'm no one's sister.

TOM

Where's he been?

BERNARD

I want everyone's undivided attention.

IKE

You got it, Bernard!

JULIA

I'll finish you off later, Ikey.

BERNARD

I see some stragglers.

BERNARD *crosses in front of the TV, halts, effectively blocking the picture.*

WAYNE

Git outta the way . . . I'm watching.

BERNARD

A minute a yer time, tha's all Ah'm askin', friend.

WAYNE

Wait 'til the commercial! C'mon, I jus' missed that goal!

CASSIE

Rude . . . rude . . . rude . . .

BERNARD

Jus' one minute!

TOM

Aw, lay off him, man!

IKE

The main man has somethin' ta say, Tom! Listen ta him!

BERNARD

Ah did some shoppin' today.

CASSIE

He means stealing.

LARRAINE *has been watching all this closely, and is the only one actually paying attention to CASSIE.*

BERNARD

I got a present for everyone here.

JULIA

Bernard, with your first paycheck!

BERNARD

Twenny one dollas cash ain't quite a paycheck, Jules.

LARRAINE *Drawn in*

Where did you get it?

LEE

Bernard spent yesterday cleaning out an old woman's apartment.

IKE

I saw it, man, it musta been sixty years a garbage.

LARRAINE

I meant the present.

BERNARD

It's for everybody!

JULIA

What a lovely gesture.

IKE

So what is it?

BERNARD *withdraws a cartoon section wrapped package from the bag as he speaks.*

BERNARD

Somethin' I've heard many people wishin' for lately. People wantin' a break from Backgammon an' TV. Somethin' which we have the Tri-State regional champion of right here in our midst.

JULIA *To herself*

Ah . . . no . . .

CASSIE

Somebody knows something.

LARRAINE

What is it?

LEE

Who gets to open it?

TOM

Julia.

JULIA

No, not me—someone else.

BERNARD

Here! Someone open it!

Silence. A moment of awkwardness. BERNARD goes to TOM.

BERNARD

Here, schoolboy, put away yer books an' open this.

BERNARD *takes TOM's book; TOM jumps up.*

TOM

Hey, give that back!

BERNARD

Jus' holdin' it while ya open the present. Hell. Ah ain't gonna steal yer (BERNARD *looks at the book*) James Bond. "On Her Majesty's Secret Service," huh?

TOM snatches the book.

CASSIE

Ever hear of Immanuel Kant?

IKE

He didn't write that! Did he?

TOM glowers at CASSIE, embarrassed; TV fills the silence. Finally, LEE takes the package, breaking the tension.

LEE

Okay, okay! I'm elected!

BERNARD holds the package out to LEE who takes it, begins to rip the paper.

JULIA

Save the paper!

IKE

It's just newspaper!

TOM

Maybe she wants to read the comics.

JULIA

I don't read that kind of junk.

The package is unwrapped—it is a Scrabble set.

LEE

Scrabble! I don't remember the last time—well, yes I do.

IKE

Wow! Who plays?

BERNARD

Julia is a champion at Scrabble.

JULIA

Those are expensive, Bernard, you shouldn't have.

LEE

I love word games. Used to do crossword puzzles by the stack. I did the Times puzzle in ink! Good. I was getting tired of cards and dice.

CASSIE

Thief!

During the following sequence of dialogue, TOM

creeps back to his pad with his book, squirrels it away in a knapsack full of books, extracts a different book, a large hard-bound version of the collected "Buck Rogers In The Twenty-Fifth Century" comics, casually leafs through it.

The dialogue is spoken very quickly, each person stepping on the lines of the person before.

IKE

You wanna teach us how ta play, Jule?

JULIA

We're not finished with this game.

IKE

I'm a goner—I'll concede.

JULIA

No. We'll play it out.

CASSIE

He stole it.

BERNARD

Come on, let's play?

IKE

It's really boring to watch your empire dissolve.

LARRAINE

Bernard?

JULIA

No, I can't play—I don't want to!

BERNARD

Why not?

CASSIE

He couldn't afford that.

LARRAINE

I'd like to speak with you, Bernard.

JULIA

I don't feel like it!

BERNARD

I bought it for you, girl!

CASSIE

Lifted it!

JULIA

I hate Scrabble!

LARRAINE

Bernard!

BERNARD

What!

LARRAINE *Surprised at her own boldness*

Could we talk?

BERNARD

I am talkin'! You are interruptin'!

LEE *To IKE*

What's going on?

IKE

Somethin' bigger than Backgammon.

BERNARD

Julia!

JULIA

What?

BERNARD

What's goin' on?

LEE

You know how to play Scrabble?

IKE

I think so.

LEE

I can teach you if you've forgotten.

IKE and LEE put aside the backgammon set, start to open the Scrabble.

JULIA

Nothing, Bernard, it's not you! I just don't want to play!

BERNARD

Since when?

WAYNE goes to the TV, turns up the volume several points.

LARRAINE

Whoa!

WAYNE

Can't hear m'self think!

TOM

That's because you don't know how! Turn it down!

LARRAINE

Hold it!!!

Silence, except for the TV, which blares into the vacuum. LARRAINE is stunned at her own effect.

LARRAINE

There are people trying to sleep, or read. We have to consider them.

WAYNE *turns the TV down a notch.*

LARRAINE

A little more, please.

WAYNE

Shit. *Reluctantly he turns it down a hair more.*

LEE

C'mon Wayne, grow up.

LEE *goes to the TV, turns it down to a respectable volume.*

BERNARD

That's why I thought a nice, quiet game like Scrabble would be jus' the ticket—

LARRAINE

It was a real nice gesture.

BERNARD

It was a complete act, not just a gesture.

JULIA

It was fine, but—

BERNARD

I paid for it!

JULIA

I know you did.

BERNARD

Did you hear? I paid for it!

JULIA

So I heard!

BERNARD

Here! *(He grabs the bag, delves into it)* Here's the fuckin' receipt! It's clean, you can play!

JULIA

I said I believed you!

BERNARD

So?

JULIA

So I've got to get some laundry done.

JULIA *exits off left. A beat of silence. TOM looks up into the silence.*

TOM

Hey! Anyone ever heard of Flash Gordon in the twenty-fifth century?

BERNARD *Still angry*

Jus' you, Space-man.

TOM

I'm no spaceman.

BERNARD

Yeah, then how'd the hell you land here?

LEE

Leave him be, Bernard.

BERNARD

Fuck off, Grandma.

LEE

Don't call me that!

The door to the outside opens very slowly, tentatively. A nicely dressed woman peeks around the door. It is GAIL.

BERNARD

You're not gonna tell me yer too young, are ya? You're not gonna lie?

GAIL

Excuse me?

LEE

LARRAINE

Can I help you?

Gail!

GAIL

Larraine, I've got to talk to you.

LARRAINE meets GAIL in the doorway.

LARRAINE

I didn't expect to see you here.

GAIL

It's not a social call.

LARRAINE

No.

IKE

To LEE

Is that a word?

LEE

Look it up!

GAIL

I just came from the house.

LARRAINE

Is everything okay?

CASSIE

Brew, trouble, brew, brew.

WAYNE

Sshh!

GAIL

I was going to take a shower.

LARRAINE

So?

GAIL

I was going to take a shower and I happened to pull a damp towel off the rack. What do you think I found?

CASSIE

Simmer and bubble, I smell trouble.

LARRAINE

Tell me.

IKE

Hold it! You mean you can take tone and turn it into stone?

LARRAINE

All it takes is an "s".

GAIL

Lice, Lorraine.

LARRAINE

Lice? Are you sure?

GAIL

I know lice. I am a beautician. Look—maybe this is no big deal for you, but I've got a business to worry about. Maybe it's okay if you bring lice into your office, maybe they won't hurt your word processing. But if you bring them into our apartment and I carry them to the salon, I'll be up the creek!

LARRAINE

Me? I brought them home? You don't know that.

GAIL

Well where do you think they came from? Look around you, huh?

LARRAINE

Gail! Sssh.

JULIA *reenters, looks around, speaks to TOM.*

JULIA

Who's she?

TOM

Sshh . . .

LARRAINE

Look, it doesn't matter where they came from. If we've got lice, we'll deal with them. We won't let this get out of hand; you won't take them to work. Perfectly respectable people get lice all the time.

GAIL

These lice did not come from respectable people! I don't understand you, Larraine. I mean, I care as much as you do about poor people. Why do you have to go sleep with them, for God's sake?

LARRAINE turns, terrified that the guests have overheard. Only TOM and JULIA seem to be listening. LARRAINE looks right at JULIA for a moment, as though searching for and finding her answer.

LARRAINE

At 6:30 this place is just a church basement with hideous yellow cafe curtains. But look—an hour later—it's home. It happens every night. A miraculous transformation. I can't figure it out—they live out of knapsacks and paper bags. What do they bring to the place?

GAIL

Looking directly at TOM

They bring vermin!

LARRAINE grabs GAIL by the arm, pulls her outside.

LARRAINE

Is that all you can think about? Look, I'll pay for the fumigation!

GAIL

It's not the money!

LARRAINE

Exactly! So what is it?

GAIL breaks away, leaves. LARRAINE calls after her.

LARRAINE

What is it, Gail? Answer me!

GAIL is gone. LARRAINE takes a moment to compose herself.

BERNARD

Ever had lice, Wayne.

WAYNE

Lice're my best friends—they don't make any noise.

CASSIE

Vermin are living creatures!

IKE

Hey! What a great word—V-E-R—shit! Not quite.

The door opens, LARRAINE steps in. Silence.

Beat. JULIA moves first, toward LARRAINE.

JULIA

Hey, Larraine, you know how to make that stupid washing machine work?

LARRAINE

Well I can look. I'm not much with plumbing though.

They exit together. The room breathes.

TOM

CASSIE

My sister got lice once.
She was a VISTA volunteer.
She worked with poor people in
the Appalachian Mountains.
I'm on my way to Boston right
now, to see her. She's got a
three thousand volume library.
Right in her own house. No
more lice for her!

Last summer I almost
drowned,
But I held my breath, and
I kicked my feet,
And I moved my arms
around,
Yeah, moved my arms
around.
Oh, I held my breath and
I kicked my feet,
And I moved my arms
around.

Quiet settles over the shelter. End Scene II.

SCENE III.

Silence, except for the TV. Slowly, everyone begins to move—the same stylized movement used earlier. Blankets are unrolled, the TV turned off, etc. The lights dim to black as the last stragglers lie down on their mats; LARRAINE sleeps on a pad near the door. Silence, except for the noise of sleeping, coughing, groaning, shifting, turning. These are not deep sleeps. A scratching sound. Moonlight reveals JULIA, sitting on her pad, filing her nails. She has a tiny disposable flashlight which she uses to inspect her handiwork. Finally she puts away her file, gets a folded piece of paper from under her pad. Carefully, silently, she gets up and, avoiding stepping on anyone else's pad, she makes her way to TOM's, where she crouches.

JULIA *Whispering*

Tom. Tom?

TOM

Uh? (*Not waking*) Get out of here with that stuff. I don't want any more.

JULIA

Tom, it's Julia!

A loud snore from WAYNE makes her jump.

JULIA

Tom!

TOM *Rousing*

Wha . . . Who is it?

JULIA

Julia.

TOM

'Sa middle a th' night.

JULIA

Yeah—I don't know.

TOM sits up, yawns, squints at JULIA.

TOM

'Sthere a fire, or what? It's three AM, Julia!

JULIA

I need your help!

TOM

My help? Now?

JULIA

Can you come and talk?

TOM

I'm asleep!

Another snore from LEE; a groan from IKE.

JULIA

Come on—just for a minute. Please?

TOM

Okay, okay. Go on. I'm coming.

TOM rises, clutching a blanket around himself, follows JULIA into the office.

TOM

Yeah?

JULIA

I need your help.

TOM

My help? Why?

JULIA

You're my friend.

TOM

I am?

Pause. A sneeze from CASSIE.

JULIA

Sure. I have a lot of respect for you, Tom.

TOM

What sort of respect?

JULIA

Welll—your reading, your imagination . . .

TOM

Yeah?

JULIA

So I wondered—But you mustn't tell a soul.

TOM

Tell them what?

JULIA

That I asked you.

TOM

Asked me what?

Pause. JULIA gathers her courage.

JULIA

Well, most people around here think I know a lot about a lot of things.

TOM

Reaching to her

You're just a kid, Julia. That's okay.

JULIA

Pulling away

It's not that!

TOM

It's not?

JULIA

Look at this.

JULIA reaches into a pocket, withdraws a folded envelope, then a sheet of paper from the envelope: a blank form.

JULIA

It's an application for a job.

TOM

What kind of job?

JULIA

Doesn't matter. Housecleaning.

TOM

Can't you do better?

JULIA

What are my choices?

TOM

You're smart, Julia!

JULIA

Smart enough to be a whore? I had some friends into that. What a life—plenty of cash, pimps who treat 'em fine. Could be me. But it's not!

TOM

I didn't mean that.

JULIA

No. What did you mean?

An awkward silence. TOM reaches out, takes JULIA's hand, gentle.

TOM

I'm sorry.

Another silence, less awkward. IKE stirs and moans. JULIA lights her flashlight.

JULIA

Don't laugh.

TOM

Me?

JULIA

I need help filling this out.

TOM

What kind of help?

JULIA

You read me the questions, I'll tell you the answers, you write them down. Neatly. Like you were a girl.

TOM looks at JULIA, realizing her illiteracy and shame.

TOM

But the Scrabble?

TOM censors himself.

JULIA

Bernard is not my father! It's none of his business whether I play Scrabble or not!

TOM nods, understanding, looks at the application, picks up a pen, leans in to the beam of the flashlight.

TOM

Last name?

JULIA relaxes, leans forward to TOM. Lights fade, the flashlight goes out. End Scene III.

SCENE IV.

The lights return—morning light. In transition movement, the guests put away pads and blankets, etc., and clear out. A beat. Empty shelter. DENNIS enters, immediately begins searching for something. LARRAINE follows quickly.

LARRAINE

What are you looking for? Can I help?

DENNIS

Were you here the night the sink broke and I forgot to pick up my baby son?

LARRAINE

One month ago today. Today is my anniversary.

DENNIS

Is it? Well, Bunny-boo, who has been my daughter Annie's constant bedmate since she was born, disappeared that night.

LARRAINE

And she hasn't slept in a month?

DENNIS

We tried a replacement. Annie didn't like him because he had too many eyes (two!) and he's scratchy. We pulled off one eye and washed him half a dozen times, but she's not easily bought. In the interest of future restful nights I thought I'd better look here. Who knows, maybe he followed me in.

LARRAINE

Good idea.

They both look in silence for a minute.

DENNIS

What are you doing here in the middle of the day?

LARRAINE

I had the day off. Found myself at the church door. Do you think he'd have gotten stuck at the back of the filing cabinet?

DENNIS

Who knows? It's worth a try. You've been here a lot in the past month. You better be careful. I don't want to lose you to burnout.

LARRAINE

I thought about that. It's funny—but each time I come here I

find it harder to leave. I keep getting tangled up in these lives, these relationships. Suddenly, they're my life, my relationships. I know they don't have anything, but I keep thinking they have more than I do. In some mysterious way. Nothing but files in there.

DENNIS

No. You're being pretty romantic for someone who sits at a computer all day.

LARRAINE

It isn't a computer, it's a word processor.

DENNIS

Pardon me.

LARRAINE

Computers are a little more romantic. More possibilities. I need some romance, I guess.

DENNIS

Is that why you come here?

LARRAINE

Maybe. No. I know better. But there's something—connection? Guilt? Family? For me, in the middle of the chaos of life, there is peace here. I come here for peace. Sorry, no Bunny-boo.

DENNIS

Shoot. No Bunny-boo. Peace—do you want to trade places?

LARRAINE

Do you type?

DENNIS *shrugs*. DENNIS and LARRAINE *exit*.
End Scene IV.

SCENE V.

Outside the shelter, downstage of it, CASSIE runs on, breathless, carrying a handful of money—bills—and a pack of Marlboros, in addition to several bags full of miscellaneous food and clothing. LEE hurries on in pursuit.

LEE

Cassie! Cassandra!

CASSIE

Ssshhh. . .

LEE

Wait!

LEE *reaches for CASSIE, who pulls away.*

CASSIE

Hush!

LEE

Why'd you take off like that? I was still looking at the birthday cards.

CASSIE

I had to.

LEE

Why? What did you do?

CASSIE

Cigarettes . . .

LEE

No! You didn't!

CASSIE

I needed cigarettes.

LEE

But you can't go around stealing, Cass.

She waves the crumpled mass of bills at LEE.

CASSIE

I didn't steal! I paid for the cigarettes.

LEE

So what's the matter?

CASSIE

I gave them a twenny, and they git so mad when I do that. But I got scared they'd ask me for the right change or something, or say I didn't pay enough. But twenny's more than enough, I know Marlboros cost less than that, so I jus' dropped the twenny on the coun'er an' got outta there as fast as I could! An' the guy yelled after me to count my change, and I can't do that! I can't! I hate money!

LEE

You paid twenty dollars for a pack of cigarettes?

CASSIE

It's not the money. I don't care about the money. He yelled at me. I can't stand people yelling at me.

LEE

I want to go back and find a card for Larraine, and I can get the change for you.

CASSIE

I don't want the change!

LEE

Okay. Okay.

CASSIE pulls a few bills from the wad, stuffs the rest into her pocket.

CASSIE

Here, pay for the card with this. It's from me, too. I've gotta go.

CASSIE *turns to go.*

LEE

Wait.

CASSIE

What?

LEE

Why do you hate money so much?

CASSIE *Shrugs*

Makes people mean.

LEE

I used to have money, you know.

CASSIE

So?

LEE

I let it all go—gave it away, or let people take it, like you do.

CASSIE

Why?

LEE

Thought what you think, I guess. I blamed all my problems on it.

CASSIE

Yeah? How much did you have?

LEE

Four bank accounts, money market accounts, mutual funds, stock portfolios, CDs, IRAs. I lived in a split level ranch house on a private drive. Sundeck, pool, two cars. Husband. Four great kids.

CASSIE

What're you trying to tell me?

LEE

My daughter calls me a derelict. Won't let me near my grandkids. Maybe she'd feel differently if I had held onto some of that money.

CASSIE

So? That's your problem!

LEE

And it's yours, too.

CASSIE

Mine?

LEE

Seems like it's a sin wasting all that money.

CASSIE

Don't talk sin to me!

LEE

You gotta count your money, Cassie, and put it in a bank.
Use it to help get what you need.

CASSIE

You think I can buy that?

CASSIE *laughs, a robust, uncharacteristic laugh.*
She exits, still laughing.

LEE

Twenty bucks for a pack a Marlboros. Five lives for a double martini.

LEE *exits. End Scene V.*

SCENE VI.

The shelter, about 6:45 PM FATHER J., the senior priest of the parish, enters, looks around.

FATHER J.

It's really not very large, Dennis.

DENNIS, *following, carrying his briefcase.*

DENNIS

Tell me.

FATHER J.

I mean, twenty pre-schoolers need a lot of room.

DENNIS

Considerably more than thirty adults?

FATHER J.

You know what I'm saying.

DENNIS

Why are you so set on this pre-school idea? I've fought the city, the neighbors and universal apathy to keep this place going, Father. I never thought I'd have to fight you.

FATHER J.

The parish has other commitments and priorities, Dennis. I have obligations to them, too. Maybe this is the push you need to get looking for a twenty-four hour house.

DENNIS

A push. Just what I need. The question is, Father, where do you imagine I'm being pushed to?

FATHER J.

Is that a veiled threat?

DENNIS *Smiling*

Read my lips, Father.

FATHER J.

I think I hear you.

LARRAINE *enters, carrying a small brown paper lunch bag aloft.*

LARRAINE

Dennis! What is this? I went to the freezer to get the coffee—

DENNIS

There was a hands-off sign on that, Lorraine.

LARRAINE

I was curious.

DENNIS

Immediately after this morning's budget meeting, where I watched twenty-five percent of our funding disappear and saw plans to put a day care center down here, I collided with three members of the Neighborhood Coalition, headed up by Mrs. Dempsey, who (DENNIS *snatches the bag from LARRAINE*) was wildly waving this brown paper bag in my face, yelling "Human feces on my front steps! What has this neighborhood come to?" I explained that we have warm clean bathrooms in the shelter and that taking a dump outside in sub-zero January winds isn't anyone's idea of fun. I wanted to look her straight in the eye and say "Shit, Mrs. Dempsey."

FATHER J.

Instead you saved the bag.

DENNIS

I thought it might come in handy.

FATHER J. *Reaches for the bag*

May I?

DENNIS

You have a plan?

FATHER J.

I have several. First I'm going to dispose of this.

DENNIS

Shit.

FATHER J.

Exactly. I've got a meeting at seven. I'm late. We'll talk more later, Dennis. Good night, all.

FATHER J. *exits.*

DENNIS and LARRAINE

Good night, Father.

DENNIS

Thanks for doing the dirty work!

FATHER J. *Off stage*

Don't mention it!

DENNIS and LARRAINE *are laughing.*

DENNIS

I would have thrown it away, you know.

LARRAINE

You're an incurable gentleman.

DENNIS

Just a gutless professional social service provider. Tactful to my teeth.

DENNIS *sits heavily, a bit of a collapse.*

DENNIS

What I'm longing for at this moment is three days alone in a luxurious hotel suite. Thick towels, bathtub, featherbed, stereo—and a punching bag.

LARRAINE

Would that solve everything?

DENNIS

I never said it would.

DENNIS *stands, ready to go.*

DENNIS

Well, maybe I can at least go home and spend an evening and a night with Hattie and the kids. I think I need that. Do you feel ready to spend the night alone? The other volunteer cancelled.

LARRAINE *Less certain than her words*

Sure. I can handle it. I'll hardly be alone, with thirty other people here. Don't worry. Go on home.

DENNIS

I don't know what I'd do without you lately, Larraine.

LARRAINE

I have a feeling you'd manage.

There is a pounding on an inside door, offstage.

DENNIS

Who the hell could that be? I don't think I want to know. Would you get it?

LARRAINE

Sure.

LARRAINE *hurries off. While she is gone, DEN-*

NIS *begins to set up coffee, etc., listens to the voices that soon come from offstage.*

LARRAINE

Does he know you're coming?

ANCHOR

We spoke about coming out sometime during the day, oh, maybe a week ago. But then we thought how much more interesting an evening would be.

LARRAINE

What did you say your name was?

ANCHOR

Lister. Fred Lister. (*Pause*) Of course—now you recognize me!

DENNIS

Shit.

LARRAINE

Just wait here a moment, please.

LARRAINE *appears, unaware that ANCHOR and CAMERA have followed her, are already "scoping the place out."*

LARRAINE

Some people from Channel Six News are here—Dennis, how do we get rid of them?

DENNIS

ANCHOR

Larraine—

You must be Mr. Hill.

LARRAINE *whirls around, astonished.*

LARRAINE

I asked you to wait!

ANCHOR

We just wanted to get a glimpse—so where is this shelter?

LARRAINE

This is it!

ANCHOR

DENNIS

This?

Mr. Lister.

ANCHOR

Oh, Fred, please.

DENNIS

Fred.

ANCHOR

And this is Sue Evans.

DENNIS

CAMERA

Hi . . .

So good to meet you, Mr. Hill.

DENNIS

Dennis.

CAMERA

Dennis.

They shake hands. A feeling of absolutely false warmth. Pause.

DENNIS

ANCHOR

Look, Fred, it's just great So—shall we get down to
that you want to do a story on business?
us—

Awkward pause. Each defers to the other.

DENNIS

Look, we really can't have you in here with your camera and
microphone without any advance notice. It's not fair to the guests.

ANCHOR

We're doing these people a favor, we're giving them a break.
You yourself mentioned the need for some positive publicity. It's
bound to stir up some responses in town, get you some donations,
and some political support. I gather a City Council hearing on the
homeless problem is coming up.

LARRAINE

But you don't just invade people's—

DENNIS

ANCHOR

Lorraine!

We did a story last month
on a family of ten burned out of
their house. Lost the father
and two kids. Those folks are
safe and warm in donated shel-
ter and clothing that poured in
after our story was broadcast.
Folks want to help.

DENNIS

That's true. But you have to ask people's permission before
you move in with the cameras.

ANCHOR

I'm asking your permission now.

DENNIS

Yeah, but I'm not the one—

ANCHOR

And nothing will be aired unless the subject signs a release
form.

DENNIS

I understand that, but—

ANCHOR

Listen, there are plenty of other stories to cover in this city tonight. We chose this one because we think it's important, and it's human. It's always good to hit the viewers with a reminder that there are others less fortunate—keeps us all honest, right? You can't afford to lock out the public. You need them to keep up this fine work.

A pounding on the outside door. LARRAINE glances at her watch.

LARRAINE

It's 7:05, Dennis.

ANCHOR

Just say the word, and we'll be gone. And I assure you—we won't disturb you again.

Another pound.

LARRAINE

It's five below without the wind.

DENNIS is caught for a moment, unable to decide. Finally, he moves.

DENNIS

Please, try to respect their privacy. Remember, they're not expecting you. Some will not want to be filmed.

ANCHOR

Sure. Okay, great, let's go Sue!

ANCHOR

CAMERA

Try going for this angle, catch them as they're coming in the door. Kind of a give-me-your-tired image. Then we'll go for the individuals, the close up one on ones.

Perfect angle!

DENNIS

LARRAINE

Look, when you open up, try to catch as many people as you can and warn them about this. Don't scare them away—just try to get them informed.

Okay.

LARRAINE heads for the door.

LARRAINE

Ready?

DENNIS

Ready?

ANCHOR

Ready!

DENNIS

Ready!

LARRAINE opens the door. Immediately the camera and lights come on. LARRAINE tries to speak to the guests, who are too cold to stop and listen.

LARRAINE *To the passing stream*

There are some TV reporters inside—

DENNIS *To CAMERA*

What about respecting privacy?

ANCHOR

We need a sense of the group entering, the floodgates opening. Great!

CASSIE is the first person in. She covers her head and face with her coat, scoots past the camera, which swings around to follow her. But she remains covered. The camera turns back, catching IKE and BERNARD head on.

IKE

BERNARD

Don't point that thing at me! Turn that Mother off!

IKE

Ain't we gonna get some warning b'fore the camera rolls?

They turn their backs to the camera, blocking traffic.

BERNARD

Hey! Larraine! Larraine!

LARRAINE *From the door; LEE next to her*

Yeah?

BERNARD

Tell this asshole to call off the public eye!

LARRAINE

Bernard, they have permission.

BERNARD

Permission to do what?

LARRAINE

Kill the camera, would you?

IKE

Before someone kills it for you!

LARRAINE

Ike, I told you there were reporters—

The camera is turned off.

IKE

We figured they'd ask us if we wanted our pictures took.

BERNARD

I'd call this an invasion of privacy.

TOM has entered behind BERNARD and IKE.

TOM

Whoever's invading my privacy can please step aside. I got places to go and books to read.

CASSIE

What privacy?

ANCHOR *Latching onto TOM, who is trying to get past.*

Sir? Sir?

TOM

Who the hell're you?

ANCHOR

I'm with the News Action Mobile Investigative Team. So good to meet you.

CASSIE

Good to meet who?

ANCHOR

Tell me, sir, how do you consider our genuine concern for people like you an invasion of privacy?

CASSIE

I'm not like him! I want a cigarette!

TOM

You're in my space and that's my pad, and you're taking pictures of me without my consent.

ANCHOR

We asked for and received permission from the church to be here—

BERNARD

Do you see any church sleepin' down here? This may be their buildin', but it's m'face you're usin' and I don' wan' it on TV.

IKE

Shit.

CASSIE

I want a cigarette; any one have a cigarette?

BERNARD goes to the TV, turns it on, settles in.

DENNIS reappears, watches from a distance.

ANCHOR

To IKE

Sir?

IKE

Yeah.

ANCHOR

I'm wondering if you could share the story of how you came to these circumstances for me, and the viewers at home.

IKE

Home? Huh!

Pause. Others are nearby, watching, reluctant to get involved. IKE looks at DENNIS, then at LARRAINE. DENNIS shrugs.

LARRAINE

Say what you like, Ike. You're standing up for us.

Silence.

CASSIE

I want a cigarette.

ANCHORMAN digs into a pocket, produces a cigarette, hands it to JULIA.

ANCHOR

Give that to the—woman—over there, would you?

JULIA

Smiles.

Sure.

JULIA hands the cigarette to CASSIE, who inspects it closely.

ANCHOR

To IKE

Well? Have you made a decision?

CASSIE

It's not the right one!

CASSIE tosses the cigarette. JULIA, TOM and LEE laugh. LARRAINE suppresses a smile.

CASSIE

I wanta cigarette!

IKE

You want ta know my story? You wouldn't believe my story if I told ya! Okay, okay. Well, to start, I was born a dope addict. Didn't grow into it, I was that way from the time I was still curled up inside my Momma. Got it from my Momma. Pure as Mother's milk? Shit . . . you know I'm a loser from the start, right? Wrong! Went cold turkey, age ten, got m'folks d'clared unfit, and beat my ass to a foster home where I grew three inches in six months and got all A's in school. M'foster Mom used to say "You watch Ikey when everthin's quiet an' still, an' you cin see his brain a-churnin' an' his lages a-growin'." She was real proud a me, she sure was.

As IKE tells his story, there are growing signs of hilarity behind the ANCHOR and the CAMERA, from the others.

ANCHOR

I don't understand, then, if you were overcoming those odds—what terrific odds. You're a very strong person, Mister . . . ?
IKE

Ruther not have m'name in all them reports. It's not important. 'Cause my story is the story of every man, woman and child here.

Burst of silent applause and hysteria from upstage observers. DENNIS has been drawn into their activity.

ANCHOR

I'd like to hear that story. We'd all like to hear the story, and to see the man who is willing to speak.

ANCHOR signals CAMERA, who resumes shooting. DENNIS starts to intrude, but LEE holds him back, gesturing for him to wait and see. ANCHOR tries to interrupt IKE, unsuccessfully.

IKE

Man, I worked my fuckin' sweaty ass off, every fuckin' day, ass lickin' an' shit shovelin' to stay on top in that lousy shit school. An' what the hell happens? I git fuckin' framed. Damn fuckin' framed. Lousy stinkin' goddamn narcs were after me. My asshole "best friend" helped 'em. So all of a fuckin' sudden, I'm shittin' in a fuckin' hellhouse of detention with a buncha asshole narcs suckin' my brain for a bunch a shit names I never heard of—

ANCHOR finally succeeds in interrupting, when IKE slows down.

ANCHOR

Excuse me.

IKE *As if waking*

Yeah?

ANCHOR

Your language is a bit—harsh—for our purposes. Do you think you could tone it down a bit?

IKE

Too loud? Yeah, I'll try, but I got this voice from tryin' to make m'self heard in that goddamn stinkin' hellhole detention house. Had a carton fulla stinkin' good citizenship an' scholarship awards. M'fuckin' foster brother stole 'em. Pawned 'em. Shit—

wanted the money to impress some little pussy so he could git into her hotpants.

ANCHOR *signals CAMERA, who stops the filming. Long pause.*

ANCHOR

Well, thank you anyway, Mister . . . uh . . .

IKE

'Snot important. Dontcha wanna hear the rest?

ANCHOR

Another time. Actually, we do need your signature on this release form here.

IKE takes it, looks at it, hands it back.

IKE

Shit, man, I can't sign this.

ANCHOR

Oh?

IKE

No. All these years a not doin' nuthin', m'brain's just withered away. Don't know how to write no more. A mind is a terrible thing to waste, don't you know?

IKE grins, turns, walks away, and joins BERNARD at the TV, turns up the sound. Silence among the gathered guests. ANCHOR and CAMERA are stunned. Slowly, the guests move to their own pursuits. A phone rings, LARRAINE goes to answer it. DENNIS approaches ANCHOR.

DENNIS

ANCHOR

Got yourself some good material, huh? Glad to be of help to you, I hope you can present it in an objective manner.

Look, Mr. Hill, I don't think this material is really appropriate for the evening news—

They both stop, embarrassed. LARRAINE reenters.

LARRAINE

It's your producer. Phone's in the office.

LARRAINE gestures. Anchor hurries off. Awkward silence. LEE approaches, addresses CAMERAWOMAN.

LEE

I always wanted to try my hand at that.

CAMERA

You?

LEE

Of course women weren't encouraged in that kind of job when I was getting started.

CAMERA

Getting started?

LEE

You don't think I've spent my whole life in places like this, do you?

CAMERA

Well I don't—I mean I never thought—

LEE

Real estate. I was the top woman broker in the ten state region. I used to personally own five buildings. I've still got my key ring. Solid gold.

She pulls out the key ring, which hangs on a string around her neck.

LEE

No keys. Not one door I am trusted to unlock. Keys used to be the hub of my days. The empty ring feels heavier now than it ever did then.

CAMERA

What happened?

LEE

You think: you make a mistake, you can always go back, correct for it, change, repent, abstain. Sometimes the mistake is letting the door slam behind you when you've left the keys inside. You find yourself owning five buildings and having no place to go. Nowhere to be alone. But completely isolated.

CAMERA

Sounds scary.

LEE

Smiles.

It's the panic that'll make you really crazy.

Beat. Suddenly, LEE leans forward, grabs the CAMERAWOMAN by the arm.

LEE

You have a husband? Kids?

CAMERA

Yes—well my husband has custody.

LEE

Don't! Don't let anyone take them away? Get them back! Fight for them and keep them! Your children are more important than anything—or anyone. Don't let them go.

LEE is shaking the CAMERAWOMAN by her shoulders, speaking directly into her face.

CAMERA

Yeah. I'm working on that.

LEE relaxes, lets go, moves back.

LEE

Yeah. Me too.

ANCHOR returns.

ANCHOR

We gotta get going.

LEE

So soon?

ANCHOR

There's a fire over on fifty-first.

CAMERA

Great!

They assemble their gear, turn to go.

ANCHOR

Well, thank you.

IKE looks up from TV.

IKE

Hey!

ANCHOR

Yeah?

IKE

Better hurry or you'll miss that fire jus' like ya missed this one!

A beat; the TV people leave. As soon as they're gone, a general cheer. IKE is the hero of the moment.

IKE

Shit—be a long time 'fore they come steppin' on our toes again. Who gave them permission, anyway?

Two beats. LARRAINE and DENNIS exchange looks.

DENNIS

I did.

BERNARD

Whose side you on, man?

DENNIS

Yours.

BERNARD

How kin you say so when you invite asshole r'porters into our place? This may be jus' a job ta you, but it's th' closest thing ta home we have.

DENNIS

One news spot reaches a lot of people—more than I can talk to in a year. Where do you think we get the bucks to run this place? Where do you think we find the volunteers, the donations, the political support?

BERNARD

I don't care, man. Tha's yer job, not mine! But if you wanna use me as yer poster boy, you better plan on checkin' with me first!

DENNIS

Yeah, next time I'll ask you, Bernard. You and everyone else. Next time I'll interview the interviewer first! I made a fuckin' mistake!

But you better think about something. You better not expect me and Larraine and the rest of the world to do it all for you forever if you aren't going to take some responsibility yourself.

To everyone

You all could have cooperated! You know how soon we'll get their help again?

BERNARD

Help! Man, Ike was crackin' you up with the rest of us!

DENNIS

Yeah. Ike's a clown. We're all a bunch of clowns. I laughed until I remembered I've got a wife and kids waiting at home for me. Kids I haven't seen in a week b'cause I've been here working my ass off to keep this place open.

BERNARD

Hey ol' man, Ah'll take m'pack and m'blankets and m'obligations elsewhere! Yer thinkin' about yer family, while Ah'm here thinkin' 'bout where I kin spend twelve hours tomorrow an' get me some food an' not get treated like rat shit. Don' talk ta me 'bout obligations, man! Don' start pullin' strings on me now!

BERNARD goes to his corner, assembles his belongings, preparing to go. IKE turns the TV up. CASSIE groans.

IKE

Tom! "Goldfinger's" on!

DENNIS *To LARRAINE*

I've got to get home. You need anything?

LARRAINE *Sad; a bit guilty*

I'm fine. G'night Dennis.

DENNIS

Asshole reporters.

LARRAINE *goes to DENNIS, gives him an awkward hug.*

DENNIS

Thanks.

DENNIS *starts out, stops near BERNARD, who is about to leave.*

DENNIS

Don't be an idiot, Bernard. I'm leaving. You don't have to freeze to death to spite me.

DENNIS *exits.*

LARRAINE *To DENNIS' back*

Thank you.

LARRAINE *catches CASSIE's eye from where she sits knitting. They smile. CASSIE looks away, uncomfortable with the contact. LARRAINE returns to the desk, sits, tired. End Scene VI.*

SCENE VII.

Scene transition should indicate the passage of time, perhaps a month. The scene begins with LARRAINE seated at the desk, talking on the phone. There is some hushed activity in the shelter, from which LARRAINE is turned away. CASSIE, IKE, LEE, JULIA and TOM are huddled together, in conspiracy.

LARRAINE

I know. I know it was important and I wanted to be there. Sure, let me talk to her. Hi. Cat? Listen, Cathy, I'm sorry to be missing the party. Let's have lunch tomorrow, okay? Sure I mean it, Cathy, you're the only sister I've got. Were you surprised? Of course I knew, silly, I planned it all. Yeah! Well, your birthday's kind of hard to forget, you know. Twinsy. I love you too. No. No. Listen, Cathy, you're not listening to me! I can't leave now. The other volunteer never showed up, he's got the flu, the neighbors are threatening to call the police, there's a lot to get done. It just

happened to be February 17th. Yes. Just happened. Cat—don't get angry at me! I can't just pick up and leave. We'll talk about it tomorrow. I am here because I want to be. I have to be. Okay? No. No, I know it's not. Yeah. Listen, enjoy the party. Half the candles are for me, huh? Yeah. Yeah. Good night.

She hangs up the phone, buries her head in her arms on the desk. Suddenly, a burst of light.

JULIA, LEE, IKE, TOM and CASSIE burst in, JULIA carrying a small cake with candles.

ALL

Singing

Happy Birthday to you,
Happy Birthday to you,
Happy Birthday, Lorraine,
Happy Birthday to you!

Wild applause. LARRAINE, caught entirely off guard, bursts into tears.

LEE

Now don't cry, just when we're about to present the gifts!

LARRAINE

Who . . . ?

LEE

Just hush and listen.

First, to help you escape and forget the smells—some apple scented bubble bath!

Wild cheers.

LARRAINE

I don't know what to say.

CASSIE

Don't say anything. My turn.

From all of us to all of you—your very own voice-saving whistle on a chain.

CASSIE blows the whistle. More cheers.

LARRAINE

You guys!

CASSIE

We're not all guys!

IKE

And last, to go with the whistle. Come here, Lorraine. Come here.

LARRAINE does so.

IKE

Your official badge. We now dub you the Sheriff of Shelter!

IKE pins a toy police badge on her. More excited applause.

LEE

Now, Sheriff, your first official duty is to cut that cake!

Laughter, applause. End Scene VII.

SCENE VIII.

Movement into middle of the night places. LARRAINE leaves, and is replaced by DENNIS. BERNARD is not present. DENNIS is asleep near the door. Snoring, coughing, etc. Suddenly, the telephone on the desk rings. JULIA sits bolt upright and screams. DENNIS struggles to his feet, stumbles across the room, accidentally stepping on TOM's pad. TOM sits up, furious and awake. The phone continues to ring.

TOM

Hey!

DENNIS

Sorry.

TOM

Fuck off!

DENNIS

Lunges for the phone, picks it up.

Yeah? Hold on.

DENNIS puts down the phone, whispers to anyone who is awake.

It's okay. Just try to go back to sleep.

DENNIS

Picks up the phone, whispers.

Bernard, why the hell are you calling? Yeah? Great, Bernard, what'm I supposed to do? Bail you out? Shit. *(Pause. DENNIS listens.)* I won't ask whose fault that was.

CASSIE sits up on her pad, begins to knit in the dark.

DENNIS

Where are you? Which precinct? *(Pause)* Christ, how'd you get all the way out there? Never mind, it doesn't matter.

Look Bernard, you get comfortable there, because I'm working by myself tonight, so I can't leave here 'til the morning. So I'll be out there first thing. *(Pause)* Listen, Bernard, you don't like it, you just call your *other* best friend—maybe someone else'll jump to get you out. I've got a responsibility to be here. I'll see you in the morning!

DENNIS hangs up, droops on the desk. Silence, ex-

*cept for the click of CASSIE's knitting needles.
CASSIE calls to him, very softly.*

CASSIE

Dennis?

DENNIS

Yeah, Cassie?

CASSIE

I have to talk to you, Dennis.

DENNIS

Cassie, it's 2:30 in the morning.

CASSIE *Almost coy*

Just take a month.

DENNIS

Well, come here then, so you don't keep everyone else up.

*CASSIE stands, her blanket wrapped around her
like a robe, and picks a path to DENNIS.*

DENNIS

What's so important?

CASSIE

You have to promise not to be mad.

DENNIS

Cassie, how can I—? Well, okay. I'll just listen. Tell me.

CASSIE

I saw him and I thought of Lee and her grandchildren. I thought she'd maybe like him for them. If nobody owned him.

*CASSIE produces Bunny-boo, Annie's lost stuffed
toy, from under the blanket.*

DENNIS

Bunny-boo! Cassie, where'd you find him?

CASSIE

He was on the floor near my pad, Dennis. I didn't steal him, you know I don't steal, don't you? I just kept him safe—he might have been stolen or thrown away. Is that his name, Bunny-boo? I was calling him Clancy, just in the meantime. Clancy was my father's name.

DENNIS

He belonged to my daughter, Annie. But his eye—did you fix him?

CASSIE

I fixed him up. I gave him a new eye and I stitched his seams and washed him. Does Annie want him back?

DENNIS

Annie has a new toy.

CASSIE

So maybe we can give Clancy to Lee. He's almost like new.

DENNIS

Sure. That's a good idea. You give him to Lee.

CASSIE

Thank you Dennis. Lee has no money to buy presents.

DENNIS

You'll make her rich.

DENNIS rises, hands Bunny-boo back to CASSIE.

DENNIS

Let's get some sleep.

DENNIS and CASSIE creep back to their pads.
End Scene VIII.

SCENE IX.

Stylized movement as the shelter empties, with pads, etc., put away. Guests begin lining up outside the shelter door. It is bitter cold and IKE, BERNARD, TOM, and JULIA are bundled in layers of acquired coats, sweaters, and scarves. TOM sits huddled, in the doorway. BERNARD and IKE are talking, JULIA is hopping up and down, alternating feet, chanting quietly, rhythmically, as an undertone to IKE and BERNARD.

JULIA

A my name is Alice and
My husband's name is Arthur,
We live in Alabama
Where we sell
Alligators!

B my name is Barbara and
My husband's name is Bob,
We live in Boston
Where we sell
Baked Beans!

C my name is Cathy
and my husband's name is
Caleb,
We live in California,
Where we sell
Catheters!

IKE

I ain't goin' back to that
lousy Lysol office again. Place
stinks of disinfectant. They
can't wait to get rid of what
they figure we must be bringin'
in with us. Boy, no wonder the
goverment's goin' broke,
buyin' all those cleanin'
supplies.

Y'know, I filled out every
lousy form they gave me last
week, Larraine helped me, and
I waited an hour on that
everlastin' line today, and what
did the bitch say when I finally
handed in the form?

D my name is Desdemona,
and my husband's name is
Dennis,

We live in Duluth
Where we sell
Diamonds!

E my name is Esther
And my husband's name is Ed,
We love in Edmonton,
Where we sell
Eggs!

F my name is Franny
and my husband's name is Fred,
We live in France
Where we sell
Forks!

G my name is Grace and
My husband's name is Gregory,
We live in Greece
Where we sell
Grenades!

H my name is Holly
and my husband's name is
Harry,
We live in Houston
Where we sell
Hats!

I my name is Irma and
My husband's name is Ike,
We live in Ireland
Where we sell
Ice!

J my name is Jane and
My husband's name is John,
We live in Jamaica
Where we sell
Jam!

*JULIA continues her hopping
and chanting through the begin-
ning of BERNARD's seven
o'clock speech, but slowly winds
down, focusing on BERNARD,*

(Imitating) "These must
be filled out in black ink only,
sir." Well, I about took the roof
off that building. An' she
showed me her straightened
gray teeth an' she says, "It
states very clearly on the top of
every form, sir, THESE
FORMS MUST BE FILLED
OUT IN BLACK INK." Well,
hell, I says to her, Hell, why
don't ya give me an F in "Fol-
lows Instructions" and take the
lousy forms. I need to get these
checks goin'. And the fuckin'
robot jus' looks at me hands me
another stack and says, "Fill
these out in black ink, sir, an
bring them back with you next
week." My God, Bernard, I
never hit a woman, but I
thought this is it, Issac, this wo-
man is no woman at all anyway,
so punch her lights out and get
the hell outta Dodge. Might
have, too, if a cop hadna walked
in jus' then. Fuck if I'm goin to
jail on accounta the govverment.
Or that hippo-bitch.

BERNARD

Man, when is someone gon-
na open the door?

IKE

Soon as they're ready man,
you know, at seven o'clock.

BERNARD

Seven o'clock, seven
o'clock! Who the fuck cares
about seven o'clock? Never
cared if seven o'clock came or
went 'til I got ta this place.
Now my whole life's wound
around seven o'clock. Sign in at
seven o'clock, back on the

although never altogether stopping her efforts to stay warm by jumping up and down. Finally, she speaks to BERNARD.) street at seven o'clock, the fuck-in' town could be blown off the face a the earth, and we'd be kicked outta here at seven o'clock!

JULIA

You aren't going to be kicked out at seven o'clock tomorrow, Bernard.

BERNARD

Huh?

JULIA

You will be expelled by 7:05 at the latest tonight. You are intoxicated.

BERNARD

Get outta m'face, bitch!

JULIA

I am not a female dog!

JULIA *growls at* BERNARD.

IKE

Hey, Julie, back off.

JULIA *Almost teary*

He ought not to talk that way to me. I thought we were friends.

BERNARD

Yeah, friends. Since when d'friends accuse their friends a drinkin' an' stealin'?

JULIA

I never accused you of stealing! And you have been drinking.

BERNARD

Go play Scrabble, little bitch!

JULIA *Angry*

I don't like Scrabble!

BERNARD

Tri-State Regional champ!

JULIA

Sometimes you believe all the wrong things, Bernard.

BERNARD

Must run in th' family.

JULIA

I am not your family!

BERNARD *Hurt*

I oughtta spank you.

IKE

C'mon Bernard, cool out.

BERNARD

Cool out? That some kinda joke, kid?

TOM

I almost froze to death once. Last—no, woulda been the winter before. But I didn't—know why? I chose the other option.

IKE

Ya went indoors?

BERNARD *has moved away from JULIA and*
IKE. *JULIA follows him, not too closely.*

JULIA

Bernard, I'm sorry.

BERNARD

Leave me alone!

JULIA

I never thought you stole the Scrabble. That was Cassie who said that.

TOM *To* IKE

The way I saw it—there's a lot of pain involved in freezing to death.

IKE

Man, I know it!

TOM

So I look at the options, and I say, killing yourself is a better option than freezing to death. (*Ironical laugh*) If you do it right. Tom makes another lousy decision.

JULIA *To* BERNARD

So it wasn't that I thought you were stealing.

BERNARD

What then?

JULIA

I can't tell you.

IKE *To* TOM

I been through a lot, Tom, and I never thought of killing m'self.

TOM *Stares at* IKE.

Then you're either crazier than I thought, or you're lyin'.

IKE

I can't help it. There's nothin' I love more than livin'. Sometimes I think it's unnatural how much I love life.

BERNARD

Girl! You ain't never gonna be worth dirt in my book long as ya keep playin' games wi'me. I may be too stoned ta walk, but I see who you are.

JULIA

You don't see shit!

BERNARD *Eyes opening, he laughs and reels.*

Oooooeeee! Miss Muffett swore?

JULIA

Fuck off!

TOM

While you were prayin' at the altar of life, I went out an' stole a pack of Wilkinson Sword Edge razor blades. First time I ever successfully lifted anything.

IKE

Yer a danger, man.

TOM

Not that time, I wasn't.

JULIA

I'm not going to tell on you about being drunk, Bernard.

BERNARD

Thanks for nuthin'.

JULIA

It is nothing. Because you'll give yourself away.

BERNARD

You steppin' over th' edge, girl. I ain't responsible.

TOM

I found a spot in the park where I could watch the horizon, sliced my arm with those sword edges, hopin' to set with the sun. But cold slows down the circulation in your limbs, you know that, Ike? It's why you get frostbite. The blood doesn't flow as fast. There I sat in the fuckin' dark, freezing my ass off, trying to squeeze the life out of myself. Next time—lengthwise cuts in a nice warm tub.

IKE

But then you wouldn't be freezin' ta death.

JULIA

You want to know the great secret? If I tell you, will you believe me? No games. Okay. Deal.

I lied about being Tri-State Regional Scrabble champ.

BERNARD *Sarcastic; sneering.*

Sheeit . . .

JULIA

I can't read, Bernard. I can't read or write! That's why I couldn't play Scrabble. I can't fuckin' read the damn forms at the Welfare Office! I learn all my big words by listening! I go to the library and listen to every recording they've got of novels, plays, poetry, everything!

BERNARD

Some princess.

JULIA

And what really hurts is I've told you all that before!

BERNARD *returns to the door, pounds and yells.*

BERNARD

Seven o'clock! Seven o'clock!

JULIA *Mostly to herself*

And you promised me you'd teach me to read. Just a secret between us.

IKE *Trying to ignore BERNARD*

Is it seven?

JULIA

I had a watch. Lost it in October.

IKE

Too bad.

BERNARD *pounds again.*

BERNARD

Hey!

JULIA

I am almost positive it was stolen.

IKE

From where?

JULIA

From where I left it in the lavatory. I always took it off to wash my hands. My sister Donna gave it to me once.

TOM

Lavatory?

JULIA

It's a little more refined than washroom, don't you think?

BERNARD

What's wrong with head, or can, or toilet, Miss Muffett?

JULIA

I will only go so far when it comes to adjusting my vocabulary to suit the mentality of the people I must associate with here. I was taught to say lavatory.

BERNARD

Sat on her tuffett,
Reading her books and plays—

JULIA

Shut up!

BERNARD

Along came a—

JULIA

I didn't tell you a thing! You never heard a word from me,
for me, or about me!

IKE

Hey now, stop—

TOM

If I saw a watch sittin' all alone in the lav-a-tory, I'd sure pick
it up. Finders keepers.

JULIA

Yeah, well, losers weepers. I cried for two days because of
that watch. Did you ever think of that?

TOM

Well, now you got nothing to lose, so you got nothing to cry
over, so someone did you a favor.

BERNARD

And frightened Miss Muffett away.

Damn, it's cold!

BERNARD *pummels the door.*

BERNARD

Seven o'clock!!!

IKE *touches Bernard from behind; BERNARD
spins around, there is an instant confrontation.*

IKE

Treading water.

They'll open it as soon as they can. They know it's cold out.

BERNARD

It's just another way a shovin' our noses in it: they're doin' us
a favor.

IKE

Shoulda stayed at dinner longer.

BERNARD

Dinner? Canned soup an' ol' bread with three hunnerd
assholes worse off'n we are?

IKE *backs off. A pause. In the silence, the winter
night sounds. JULIA jumps, startled.*

JULIA

You hear that?

IKE

What?

JULIA

Noise. Sounded like a scream.

BERNARD

You got paranoid ears.

JULIA

No.

IKE

I didn't hear anything.

TOM

I did.

JULIA

You heard it?

TOM

Sounded like a pinknoise to me.

JULIA

A what?

TOM

A pinknoise.

TOM makes an eerie, high pitched whistling sound.

TOM

Like that.

JULIA *Taking him very seriously.*

Kinda like that.

TOM repeats the sound.

JULIA

That's weird.

TOM

Yeah. (*Another sound*) That one's a white noise. You hear the difference?

BERNARD

That's bullshit man, and bullshit sounds like bullshit. That's all.

BERNARD rattles the doorknob.

TOM

Sotto voice

White noise is sharper, shriller.

JULIA

You have a noise for every color?

TOM

'Cept black.

JULIA

Black?

TOM

Which ain't to say it's not there.

JULIA

But what are they all for?

TOM

I paint with them. I highlight my environment with color. Audial color.

BERNARD

I cannot deal with psychotic individuals.

TOM

The wonderful thing about psychotics, Bernard, is that at least half the time you cannot tell who they are.

BERNARD

You step one step closer, an' you'll know who I am.

IKE

Hey, Bernard, Tom m'friends—

The tension is released by the unlocking and opening of the door by LARRAINE, who holds it open from inside. CASSIE appears, scoots in first.

BERNARD

's about time.

IKE and TOM automatically step aside to let JULIA go first. She defers.

JULIA

Go on.

BERNARD

Miss Muffett don't want to play Princess no more?

LARRAINE

Isn't anybody coming in?

TOM

Shit . . .

TOM hurries in, followed by IKE, JULIA, and BERNARD, who is suddenly intently focused on her.

BERNARD

Hey! You din't really tell me what you said you tol' me, did ya! I mean, b'fore tonight?

JULIA pretends not to hear, hurrying inside. Lights crossfade to the inside of the shelter, where DENNIS is setting up the coffee pot. LARRAINE

*watches while people start to take off their things,
chats with IKE who is nearby.*

LARRAINE

Where is everyone?

IKE

Most of 'em stayin' over at dinner a little later, so they wouldn't have ta wait outside.

LARRAINE

Good move. Were you out there long?

A STRANGER, quite dirty and disheveled with far too little warm clothing on enters, hangs back. LARRAINE does not notice him. IKE does, but continues the conversation.

IKE

Not too bad. Ten minutes maybe.

LARRAINE

Why didn't you hang out at dinner?

CASSIE speaks directly to IKE.

CASSIE

I don't want you sitting at my table ever again, you hear that?

IKE is taken aback for only an instant.

IKE

Fine, Cassie.

CASSIE goes to her place.

LARRAINE

What was that about?

IKE

God knows. Y'know, you ask me what I want more than anything in the world. I want to live in my own place, where I say who comes and goes. I want to sit down at my own table, to eat my own dinner, with no one, or someone I choose to eat with. Is that too much to ask, Larraine?

LARRAINE and IKE exchange a hug.

IKE

I think someone's wantin' ta talk ta ya.

LARRAINE turns to speak to the STRANGER, but their conversation is immediately drowned out by the raised voices at the other end of the room. BERNARD and DENNIS are arguing.

BERNARD

You can't tell me to go out there and freeze my ass off tonight.

DENNIS

You are drunk, Bernard. You know the rules.

BERNARD

Man, I had one lousy drink.

DENNIS

You're drunk.

BERNARD

Anyone else—

DENNIS

We're talkin' about you!

LARRAINE breaks away from the stranger, focuses on DENNIS and BERNARD, ready to spring into action. Likewise, IKE. CASSIE, JULIA and TOM hang back, watching, but not so alert.

BERNARD

Shit, man, I thought you was m' friend!

DENNIS

This is not about friendship, Bernard, it's about fairness and consideration.

BERNARD

I ain't botherin' nobody!

DENNIS

If we let you stay now, we'd have to let others stay. I'm telling you the same way I'd tell anyone, Bernard.

BERNARD and DENNIS lock eyes; BERNARD breaks away from Dennis' gaze, goes to his things, begins to gather them. TV news blares into the silence. BERNARD puts his packed satchel on a table, looks again at DENNIS, unable to let go.

BERNARD

Ya let anyone else stay if they suck up ta ya.

DENNIS

Get out, Bernard!

BERNARD

Man, you ain't got no right!

DENNIS, almost in tears, finally loses control.

DENNIS

You're the one without rights here, Bernard! Get the fuck out of here!

DENNIS moves toward BERNARD to move him out physically. But BERNARD stands up to him. Neither backs down, and the fight is about to start when LARRAINE propels herself between them.

LARRAINE

Stop it! Both of you!

BERNARD *looks from DENNIS to LARRAINE, focuses on DENNIS.*

BERNARD

I'm glad you said that, man. No rights here, let's get down and dirty. It's about time someone tol' the truth 'bout who's got rights.

BERNARD *turns, slams out the door.* DENNIS *yells after him.*

DENNIS

No! Man, you know that's not—Christ!

DENNIS *follows BERNARD out. They are both out on the steps, riveted on one another. Inside, a terrified silence has settled.*

DENNIS

Damn you, Bernard—never has anything like this happened before. In all the years I've worked with—

BERNARD

Bums like me?

DENNIS

I've thrown a hundred drunks out on their asses, but you know just how to get to me.

BERNARD

We been through a lot, man.

DENNIS

Yeah. And where has that gotten me?

I see you being good to people, to Julia, to Ike. Then you get wasted and you hate me. You hate me so loud and clear I start to hate back. I want to yank my name, my face, my fucking address and phone number outta your head, make sure we never see each other again. I want to lose all memory of you, to have you evaporate.

BERNARD

I'm real disappointed in you, Dennis.

DENNIS

You're disappointed in me?

BERNARD

I've seen you go through bad times, man, and you've never let anyone down. The day the call came sayin' you an' Hattie lost yer baby, I saw you stay here for an hour after that, welcomin' people, makin' them feel at home, like yer heart wasn't breakin'. Ah was with you the night the p'lice closed this place down, an Ah was

right here the next day when you opened it up again, smilin' an' wavin' at cops an' r'porters. Ah've never been moved to r'spect much in m'life, Denny, but you were one thing Ah thought Ah could count on.

DENNIS

Yeah, well, I'm tired of you and everyone expecting so much of me. Let me make that simpler: I'm plain tired.

BERNARD

You go home to bed every night.

DENNIS

Yeah! A bed I can't sleep in. I toss and turn 'til Hattie asks if I can't control myself. So I move to a mat on the living room floor. Home! Where my ability to welcome barely extends to a hug for the kids. Annie turned and ran from me the other day. I didn't even know she could run. I have a hard time believing that's what anyone means by home. I know it's not what I had in mind. These days home seems like a lost cause for me, Bernard. Even when I'm there, I'm not there.

BERNARD

Don' tell me about believin' in nuthin, man. Don' tell me about los' causes, an' los' children. Ah fought in th' bigges' los' cause of the century in Nam. All Ah got outta that was a dead man fer a bes' frien' an' a stranger where m'wife useta be. Full time nuthin' but headaches an' nightmares. Little girl who didn' even know Ah was her father. We all got our los' causes, man. An' we live with 'em, one way er another.

DENNIS

Yeah, but how? You come in here, drunk, you antagonize the people who have the resources to help us, you refuse to speak up for anyone about what's happening down here, and out there—

BERNARD

Don' preach at me, man! They've heard the story b'fore. They don' need ta hear mine. Ah don' need ta go bare ass in public an' say Ah failed, Ah fucked up. Shit—you wanna call me weak, er lazy, go 'head. Ah been called worse.

DENNIS

It's not weak or lazy. It's taking responsibility!

BERNARD

Hey! Ah'm r'sponsible fer m'self. Tha's 'bout all Ah kin handle. But Ah accept that r'sponsibility.

DENNIS

It's more than that, Bernard.

BERNARD

Shit! Ah am what Ah am! Ya don' like it, tha's cool. Ah sure don' need yer grief!

BERNARD *exits.*

DENNIS

Bernard!!!

DENNIS remains on the stoop, shivering. Gradually, JULIA, IKE, TOM, LARRAINE, LEE, and CASSIE bleed through the walls into DENNIS' awareness. This is much the same process as in the first scene.

JULIA

A job, Dennis! They said they'd let me have an interview! Part time at first but steady. Washing windows. And I found the apartment of my dreams—I can't get it, though. I don't have money for first month's rent plus a whole nother month's for a damage deposit. I never heard of such a thing—I don't keep pets or anything. What kind of damage will I do?

IKE

I see a lotta damage bein' done 'round here, Dennis. You an' Bernard're friends, you gotta keep rememberin' that. What Bernard's goin' through is just a phase. This tearin' each other apart ain't helpin' anyone. It ain't right here.

TOM

I don't belong here. I know I don't. Something's wrong with this picture when I'm in it. Got a sister in Boston I'd better go visit. She's got a library—ten thousand volumes. Haven't seen her in seven years.

LARRAINE

Shit, Dennis, I thought I was dead, stepping between you two. I was moving on instinct—instinct and adrenalin.

TOM

Bitch probably thinks I'm dead.

LARRAINE

But I did okay, didn't I? You'd tell me if you thought I was doing something really crazy, huh?

JULIA

It's crazy. No one trusts anyone up here. Where I grew up, people trusted in one another. Who do they think they are, anyway?

TOM

No one here knows who the hell I am, anyway.

TOM *exits*. DENNIS *turns to look at TOM, just missing sight of him*. LEE *holds out Bunny-boo*.

LEE

Cassie says this came from you. Thank you Dennis. I brought it to my daughter's house to give to Mandy—the little girl. My daughter wouldn't let me in the house. I don't have the key. She called me a drunk and a murderer right in front of the kids. I haven't had a drink since the night of the accident. Not one. I can't lose control for a minute. I lost three children and my husband that night! Does she think I could forget that even if I tried? Does she think if Mandy takes my present and gives me a hug that I'll pretend it never happened? I caught myself looking at my only surviving daughter, wishing she had died too. Then at least I'd have her kids to take care of. At least I'd have a family.

But I want to hold onto this. (*She strokes the toy.*) If it's okay with you. And I want to thank you and Cassie for trying to help. Maybe give it to the new baby.

LEE *freezes*. CASSIE *speaks*. *She gives the impression of being both brave and vulnerable*.

CASSIE

I know you don't want to be bothered anymore, Dennis, but I got another one a those checks today, and I'm trying to do the right thing; but I don't remember how to open a bank account. I don't think I ever did that before. That's what Lee said I should do with the money, right? So I'm trying, Dennis.

CASSIE *dives into a bag, draws out a window envelope with a check in it. She holds the check up gingerly as if it will explode*.

CASSIE

See? Here it is—it's made out to Cassandra M. Duvall.

Pause. CASSIE *adds, after a thought*.

CASSIE

M is for Mercy. That's my middle name. Mercy.

CASSIE *freezes*. *A pause*. *Suddenly all the voices start again, rising in intensity and volume until DENNIS can stand it no longer*. DENNIS *runs back into the shelter, but the others follow (except TOM), moving through walls, talking at DENNIS, back to where they were when DENNIS and BERNARD confronted one another*. DENNIS *busies himself with his desk and briefcase, trying to ignore the noise which gradually has become the*

standard shelter activity sounds. Still, it is too much. He stands and calls out.

DENNIS

Can't you all just be quiet? Quiet! I can't think around here anymore!

A hush falls over the room. Someone turns down the TV. DENNIS sags, goes to the desk, slumps over it. Activity picks up slightly. HATTIE enters through a wall near DENNIS, speaks. She is a phantom.

HATTIE

It was the craziest day today, Dennis. All over town, teeny tiny accidents stumbling into each other. And bumping into me. I don't know when I've seen so many sprained ankles and broken noses. Like the world's just getting chipped away, granules of things dropping and crunching underfoot. No one can get comfortable. Lost my keys—I've never done that before. Nursing Supervisor almost bit my head off. And I got home, and the kids were cranky and tired. I wonder where the moon is?

You're being awfully quiet, my love.

Maybe we both need a little wine and soft music, huh? C'mon, Dennis. You can relax. Dennis. Dennis?

DENNIS slowly rises and, exhausted, puts on his coat and leaves the shelter by the door. HATTIE disappears. End Scene IX.

SCENE X.

Movement into nighttime sleeping places. LARRAINE is asleep at the desk. Into the silent darkness intrudes an alarm clock noise, something fairly loud and obnoxious. Lights up slowly on the shelter area where all of the guests are asleep. The alarm is ringing on the desk. LARRAINE wakes, scrounges for the clock, holds it, still ringing, near her head. JULIA who has been wakened by the sound, comes to the doorway, watches. After a moment of watching, she speaks, softly.

JULIA

You trying to ruin your hearing with that?

LARRAINE does not hear. JULIA speaks up.

JULIA

Lorraine!

LARRAINE *Startled, jumpy, still half asleep.*

Yeah!

LARRAINE *looks, sees JULIA, turns off the clock.*

LARRAINE

What's wrong?

JULIA

I asked if you're trying to ruin your hearing with that?

LARRAINE

Didn't want to fall back asleep.

JULIA

It's one of the few things I just can't get used to. Sunrise comes and I'm listening for roosters and chickens.

LARRAINE

You got up early on the farm?

JULIA

It never seemed early then.

Awkward pause.

JULIA

LARRAINE

Lorraine, can I have the
supply cabinet keys?

Is something bugging you?

LARRAINE

Supply keys? What for?

JULIA

It's personal.

LARRAINE

Do you need something?

JULIA

I wouldn't ask if I didn't.

LARRAINE

Yeah—okay.

LARRAINE *digs for the keys.*

JULIA

I hate this—everything locked up.

LARRAINE

Things have a way of disappearing.

JULIA

I need some Tampax, okay? I never thought I'd have to be begging for Tampax!

LARRAINE

You're not begging!

JULIA

A challenge.

You're the keeper of the keys, aren't you?

LARRAINE

Yeah. Okay. I see your point.

LARRAINE stands, heads toward the pads to start waking people.

JULIA

Guess what? I've got a job interview today.

LARRAINE *Stops; turns back to JULIA.*

Great! Julia! What's it for?

JULIA

Cafeteria line. Public hospital. I ironed a blouse last night. It's hanging in the bathroom.

LARRAINE

Good luck. Let me know what happens.

JULIA

Yeah, I will. Thanks, Lorraine.

JULIA exits to the bathroom. LARRAINE looks around, exits to the kitchen. Activity is slowly becoming contagious. LARRAINE returns with a bowl full of hard boiled eggs, puts it on a table. LARRAINE wakens those who haven't woken on their own. People begin to put things away, dress, pack up, little is spoken at first. CASSIE has emptied a coin purse and is attempting to count her change. JULIA reenters in a fresh blouse, carrying a purse, goes to IKE.

JULIA *To IKE*

You see Tom?

IKE

No. Did he come back last night?

CASSIE

Count the money, go to the bank.

JULIA

I figured he came back.

LEE *To CASSIE*

Watcha doin?

IKE

Naw. He left around eight or so. Said he'd be back, I guess.

LARRAINE exits to the kitchen.

CASSIE

Counting my money, going to the bank.

JULIA

Shoot.

IKE

Why?

LEE

Can I help?

CASSIE

No! I can do it, if I have some peace an' quiet.

LEE

Okay, okay.

LARRAINE *returns with juice and paper cups. Guests take eggs and juice as they pack and clean up. LEE takes care of TOM and BERNARD's pads.*

IKE

What?

JULIA

I've got an interview, then I'm going to see an apartment. I was going to ask Tom—well, do you want to come?

IKE

Tom, huh? Sure. I'll come. Sounds okay. Where should we meet?

JULIA

Library at two?

STRANGER *To Lee*

We get any breakfas' b'fore we go?

LEE

Whatever's on the table.

LARRAINE *To LEE*

Lee, I got a call the other day. I've been asking people to come to next week's city council hearing on joblessness. Will you come and testify?

LEE

Gee, Lorraine, I don't know too many people without jobs. I heard things are looking up—the stock market's been bullish this last year or so.

LARRAINE

Great! I'll let you know when.

STRANGER

That all there is for breakfas'?

IKE

Hey, we do what we can do.

CASSIE *drops her change on the floor, watches it*

roll away. Horrified, JULIA, LEE and IKE and STRANGER hurry to collect the change.

JULIA *Looking up at CASSIE*

How much was there, Cass?

CASSIE *Panicked at the question.*

I don't know. I hardly had time to count it. I don't know what happened. Was like a big gust of wind came along an' pulled it outta my hand.

JULIA nods, the search resumes. The STRANGER looks at CASSIE, makes a judgment and a decision. He puts a handful of change into his pocket, hands just a few coins to CASSIE.

STRANGER

Here.

CASSIE accepts the coins, realizing what he's done, but unable to act. LEE sees also, and jumps up.

LEE

There is no monetary reward for picking up Cassie's change.

IKE

Cassie gets all the money back.

JULIA and IKE have risen, handed CASSIE her money, and surrounded the STRANGER.

STRANGER

I dunno what you're talking about.

JULIA

We don't steal from each other here.

CASSIE

He's a thief!

IKE

He made a mistake.

CASSIE

A killer an' a thief!

LEE

He'll give it back.

CASSIE

He's a criminal!

STRANGER

It's between her and me.

JULIA

She's my sister.

LEE

And mine.

IKE

And mine.

JULIA

Return her money.

IKE

Or we'll kick the shit out of ya.

LEE

And then call the police.

*Pause while the STRANGER considers. CASSIE
hisses at him.*

CASSIE

He's a sinner and a thief!

LEE

You make your choice.

IKE

Now!

*Pause. STRANGER looks around. Everyone else,
including LARRAINE, who watches, ready to
move in. No one moves to interfere, though.*

STRANGER *Digging into his pocket*

Here's her damn money!

JULIA takes the money.

LEE

All of it?

*STRANGER retrieves a few stray coins, hands
them to JULIA.*

STRANGER

That's it.

LEE

Thanks for your honesty.

JULIA gives the money to CASSIE.

IKE

You can go now.

CASSIE *To STRANGER'S back, as he exits*

God go with you!

*STRANGER halts, looks back at CASSIE, puzzled
and startled. She smiles. He leaves hurriedly. The
room sighs.*

LARRAINE

It's almost seven, crew. Better eat something and clear out.
*The room is cleared, people grabbing eggs and juice
on the run. End Scene X.*

SCENE XI.

The shelter is empty. TOM is alone, just outside the shelter, hiding in the shadows, watching the others leave. After the last person is gone, TOM speaks, addressing the shelter door.

TOM

Anybody notice I wasn't there last night? I slept in the train station. Dreamt I was driving to Boston. In my own car. Convertible Rabbit. Packed with books, munchies and cassette tapes. Talking Heads and Mozart. AM/FM Stereo. Buzzing the highway, going to see my sister.

Cop woke me up, poked me with a stick to see if I was dead. Found out I wasn't and kicked me outta the last warm place I could find.

Just a place where I could sleep as late as I wanted. Could dream. A place where I could unpack my books and leave them all over the floor. No one could tell me to move along.

Every day I watch it get further away.

TOM fades back into the shadows. End Scene XI.

SCENE XII.

Lights up on the shelter area. FATHER J. enters, followed by DENNIS.

FATHER J.

We can look at the budget, but I really don't see how you can afford another salary. A living wage is a lot of money.

DENNIS

What if we phased out my salary?

FATHER J.

Why do I think you're trying to tell me something?

DENNIS

Larraine is good. Right now she's a lot better than I can be. I think she'd be better for the shelter than I am.

FATHER J.

What happened?

DENNIS

Last night I told Bernard he has no rights here.

FATHER J.

What you need is a vacation.

DENNIS

Father—

FATHER J.

Don't make any sudden decisions, Dennis. We'll find some money for Larraine for a month. You take three weeks away.

DENNIS

A month?

FATHER J.

It's all I can promise now.

DENNIS

I'll ask her. And I'll think about the vacation.

FATHER J.

Just take it.

DENNIS

I'll let you know.

FATHER J. *exits, leaving DENNIS, who sings, softly, to himself.*

DENNIS

Last summer I went swimming,

Last summer I almost drowned.

CASSIE and HATTIE, *in the shadows, join him.*

DENNIS, CASSIE, HATTIE

But I held my breath

And I kicked my feet

And I moved my arms around,

Yeah, moved my arms around.

End Scene XII.

SCENE XIII.

Transition to nighttime light. The shelter is dark. Outside the door, on the steps, BERNARD is sprawled, drinking and singing. It is a warm evening, for winter.

BERNARD

Tell ol' Bill when he come home

This mornin'

Tell ol' Bill when he come home

This ev'nin'.

Tell ol' Bill when he come home

To let that stinkin' gin alone

This mornin's this ev'nin' so soon.

Ol' Sal was bakin' bread

This mornin'

Ol' Sal was bakin' bread

This ev'nin'

Ol' Sal was bakin' bread—

BERNARD is interrupted by a sound, some movement in the shadows. He freezes, listening. Silence. He cautiously takes a swig from his bottle. Then, from the shadows, comes the sound again—what he hears is what we hear—the sound TOM made that scared JULIA outside the shelter—the pinknoise.

BERNARD remains frozen, listening, trying to focus. The sound registers on his memory. We hear TOM's voice.

TOM

That's a pinknoise. I paint with them. I highlight my environment with color.

BERNARD waits, the sound repeats, faint.

BERNARD

That you, Tom?

No response. BERNARD pockets his bottle, turns to look for the source of the noise.

BERNARD

Tom?

TOM

While you were prayin' at the altar of life, I lifted some Wilkinson sword-edged—

BERNARD

Tom, that you?

BERNARD is beyond the lit area. In the darkness, we hear BERNARD stumble, his stifled scream.

BERNARD

Holy God, man, what you do to yourself?

BERNARD strikes a match, the area grows slightly brighter. TOM is slouched on the ground, huddled. There is fresh blood on his clothes; he is bleeding heavily where he has slit his wrist.

BERNARD

How long you been here like this?

TOM

Smiling; wan.

Long 'nough to know better.

TOM makes another shrill, piercing noise.

TOM

Blue noise helps the pain.

BERNARD

Man, stay here, I'm gonna call the ambulance.

TOM grabs BERNARD's arm.

TOM

Save the taxpayer's money, Bernard.

TOM shifts, in tremendous pain.

TOM

I'll pass out b'fore I die. Shit—another failed adventure.

A pause. BERNARD rips away layers of clothing, taking off his shirt.

BERNARD

Hold on, Tom, they on their way. I remembered about a tourniquet—was that it?

TOM waves him away. BERNARD is insistent.

BERNARD

I gotta stop the bleedin'!

TOM

Why? So I can live longer? What's the point, Bernard? I've already gone through the pain. I don't stand out in a room full of drunk, crazy bums. Let me go.

BERNARD *Trying the joke tack*

Man, it's hard to stand out in that crowd.

BERNARD is trying desperately to stop the flow of blood, but doesn't know how to apply even elementary first aid. His hands are shaking. He looks up as TOM passes out.

BERNARD

I'm sorry it was me found ya, Tommy. Maybe someone else coulda helped.

BERNARD gives up, sits helpless beside the lifeless body, tears coming to him. Softly, he sings to TOM.
End Scene XIII.

SCENE XIV.

Lights fade on BERNARD and TOM, up to full on DENNIS and LARRAINE in the shelter. Next morning.

DENNIS

Father J. guaranteed a month. I figure we'll work together for this month, then you'll step into my position.

LARRAINE

So I'm supposed to handle it all on my own? The coordinat-

ing, the fundraising, the politics. If you can't do it alone, how do you expect me to?

DENNIS

I've done it alone for almost three years. You're starting fresh.

LARRAINE

Well that gives me something to look foward to.

Have you definitely decided then?

DENNIS

Yes! No! I don't know. Not yet. But in either case, will you work full time for at least this month?

LARRAINE

So much for romance with the word processor.

DENNIS

You're a miracle!

LARRAINE

I'm a masochist!

They laugh; embrace. The door opens, slowly.

BERNARD, *still bloody and dazed, enters.*

BERNARD

Denny?

DENNIS *looks up.*

DENNIS

Bernard, what the hell—?

BERNARD

The door was unlocked.

DENNIS

I'm getting very tired of patching your wounds every time you spend a night on the town. You look like you need an emergency room anyway. Christ, whose blood is that?

BERNARD *Breaking down; tears.*

Ah tried ta save him, Denny. Ah tried, but Ah fucked up. Couldn' r'member a sling from a band aid.

DENNIS

Bernard, we don't have time for this.

LARRAINE

Dennis!

BERNARD

Ah cared, Dennis! Ah cared ta make him live! Ah hated ta see him take his own life b'cause a me, b'cause a you, b'cause a this!

DENNIS

Who? Bernard, who??

BERNARD

Ah'm talkin' 'bout Tom, man, his blood's all over me. He killed himself las' night, man.

DENNIS

LARRAINE

Oh God.

No—

DENNIS *stumbles backward, pale.* LARRAINE *steadies him.* BERNARD *approaches, stands very close to DENNIS.*

BERNARD

Ah know what it's like ta give up, Denny, an' Ah couldn' stand ta see him do it. Ah tried ta save him!

DENNIS

You tried to save him? How? Did you think if you got drunk enough Tom would live?

BERNARD

Ah had a drink! Yeah! He died in mah arms! Ah had ta forgot how that felt.

DENNIS

Forget! Why should you? You want Tom to matter at all, you remember!!

BERNARD

Ah know ya hate me, Denny, but it's important—Ah tried ta save Tom.

BERNARD *has put his hands on DENNIS' shoulder.* DENNIS *pulls away.*

DENNIS

Did you call the police, Bernard? Where is Tom now?

BERNARD

Outside. In the bushes. He's all alone, Denny.

DENNIS

Well, come on then, and show me. Larraine, call the police, please. And then you'd better start thinking of yourself as employed here on a full time permanent basis.

BERNARD *and DENNIS start to exit.*

LARRAINE

Dennis! You can't!

DENNIS

I have to.

DENNIS *and BERNARD exit, then carry off TOM's body.* End Scene XIV.

SCENE XV.

Transition: the opening of the shelter. Clothes are lighter, it is spring. The shelter fills up. Last to enter is an unfamiliar young man. STEPHEN, who stands to the side.

LARRAINE

While you're signing in, I need volunteers to testify at the City Council hearings on homelessness.

Silence. No response. Not even shelter noise.

LARRAINE

Hey, come on! No one? Julia? Ike? Hey, listen to me! We need witnesses!

The response this time is hurried, off the cuff, casual.

JULIA

Hey, I've got a job now, Larraine, I don't have time. B'sides, I won't be a homeless statistic for long. I'm moving next month!

IKE

Gee Larraine, I'm no good with authority-types, y'know? An' I'm not really typical. I mean, who is?

LEE

Naw, they bring TV cameras into those meetings. Last thing I need's for my grandkids to see me on the six o'clock news.

CASSIE

I don't think so, Larraine. They'll make me sign my name and ask a lot of embarrassing questions. Like they did at the bank.

LARRAINE

I don't understand. It's a chance for you to be heard!

BERNARD

They hear us. They see us every day, they can't miss us. We are testimony, just by living how we live. Hey! They wan' ta talk to someone, tell 'em ta talk ta Tom.

Silence. Beat. TOM, a phantom, drifts through a wall, speaks.

TOM

If you really want to get outta this place—you deduce the way out. Make the quantum leap.

STEPHEN

Excuse me, I'm hunting for Larraine. Is anyone around here Larraine?

LARRAINE is pulled back to the present by STEPHEN's voice.

LARRAINE

Huh?

TOM

This isn't just another desperate job hunt. There's more to it than that.

STEPHEN

I'm looking for Lorraine.

LARRAINE

I'm Lorraine.

STEPHEN

My name's Stephen. I'm a new volunteer. I'm sorry I'm late. My roommate had some car trouble, then I got caught in a traffic jam.

LARRAINE

A traffic jam . . . ?

STEPHEN

Lorraine? You okay?

LARRAINE

No. Not really. Come on, I'll show you around.

LARRAINE and STEPHEN exit. CASSIE begins to sing the swimming song. Slowly, the others join her. They all sing it all the way through except for TOM, who watches, silent. Blackout. End.